



POLICY BRIEF

The Resurgence of Tahriib in Puntland: A Policy Brief on Youth Unemployment and Migration using a system dynamics approach

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PYAN
Puntland Youth Association Network

"Young people should be at the forefront of global change and innovation. Empowered, they can be key agents for development and peace. If they are left on society's margins, all of us will be impoverished. Let us ensure that all young people have every opportunity to participate fully in the lives of their societies."

Kofi Annan, Former United Nations Secretary-General.

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1. Background

Somalia has one of the youngest populations globally, with more than 80 percent of the population below 35 years of age¹. Migration (Tahriib) is the movement of individuals seeking better opportunities abroad, particularly youth. It is often irregular and involves significant risks. Many economic and non-economic forces are behind the decision of African Youths to migrate from Africa to Europe and North America. Migrants can be "pushed" out of their home countries due to deteriorating economic conditions or political unrest. Conversely, migrants are often "pulled" into destinations that offer high wages, good healthcare, or solid educational systems. In making their decision, individuals compare the net benefits of migration to the costs. Youths always migrate due to economic hardships in their home country.

Many young people seek opportunities abroad, risking dangerous migration routes to escape the lack of prospects at home. Young people in Somalia emigrate to Europe and North America for various reasons, including poverty, unemployment, conflicts and wars, wage differentials, and the desire for a better quality of life. The route from Somalia to Europe is a dangerous journey through Ethiopia, Sudan, and Libya and then to the Mediterranean Sea. Human smugglers facilitate the journey by offering deferred payment schemes, but the journey is fraught with danger, including the possibility of being held for ransom, abuse, rape, or death.² This policy paper explores the relationship between unemployment and migration, highlighting its economic, social, and political implications. It aims to determine if youth unemployment is related to youth emigration from Puntland to the Global North. The paper used a Causal Loop Diagram (CLD) to determine if feared or actual youth unemployment triggers migration decision-making in economically deprived countries like Somalia and if social networks in states like Puntland deter unemployment from forming migration intentions. It proposes actionable policy recommendations to tackle unemployment, reduce migration risks, and maximize the benefits of youth engagement.

¹ National Bureau of Statistics. (2020). Somalia Facts and Figures. Accessed at: https://www.nbs.gov.so/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/Somalia-facts-and-figures_2020.pdf

² <https://www.amazon.co.uk/Going-Tahriib-consequences-migration-Research/dp/1907431500>

“Young people in Somalia can be recruited by extremist groups, exploited by the clan militias, can involve criminal activities like drug trafficking, murder, and organized crimes if not given proper education and employment opportunities”

2. Youth Unemployment Problems in Puntland

The International Labor Organization (ILO) defines youth unemployment as the percentage of the total labor force that consists of people between the ages of 15 and 29 years who are available for work and seek to work but cannot find a job.³ The unemployment rate is a key economic indicator that measures the proportion of the labour force actively seeking employment but unable to find work. Puntland has one of the highest youth unemployment rates in the world, at 67%. This means more than two-thirds of the state's young people are unemployed and not in school. Decades of conflict and limited economic and industrial growth have hindered economic opportunities, especially in urban and rural areas. Education remains challenging, with disparities between urban and rural/nomadic regions. Many youths lack platforms for skill development and entrepreneurial opportunities. Many Puntland graduates struggle to find work despite increased access to education and postsecondary participation. This indicates a mismatch between the labor market's demands and educational attainment.

Puntland society is deeply rooted in clan-based traditions crucial to social organization, decision-making, and conflict resolution. Clan influence often defines social dynamics and access to resources, presenting opportunities and challenges for CSOs. Job opportunities are usually distributed based on clan affiliations or connections rather than merit, leaving many skilled youths unemployed. Young women face additional barriers due to cultural restrictions, early marriage, and limited access to education or formal work opportunities. The lack of resources like training centers, markets, and business development initiatives exacerbates the problem. Without employment opportunities, Somalia's youth remain vulnerable to exploitation by violent groups and criminal networks.

“In contexts of widespread poverty and unemployment like Puntland, young people and workers may be at higher risk of exploitation, particularly when there are no strong civil society organizations or unions.”

³ ILO, Key indicators of youth labor markets: Concepts, definitions, and tabulations (2009). Available at https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/@ed_emp/documents/instructionalmaterial/wcms_140860.pdf

3. Unemployment and Migration in Puntland

Youth in Puntland face significant challenges, with high unemployment rates, limited access to education, and social and economic barriers. Youth unemployment is influenced by multiple factors and, in turn, impacts others. For instance, lack of access to quality education or vocational training reduces employability, feeding into both youth unemployment and stunted economic development. Poverty/Low wages contribute to unemployment as the economy fails to absorb skilled or semi-skilled labor, and low earnings discourage youth participation in the labor market. Corruption creates inefficiency in job allocation and access, while mismanagement of resources and lack of transparency hinders effective job creation and economic stability. In Puntland, jobs are often distributed based on clan loyalty rather than merit, marginalizing a significant portion of the youth. Environmental challenges and population pressures can strain job markets, while clan favoritism or nepotism can limit merit-based job access.

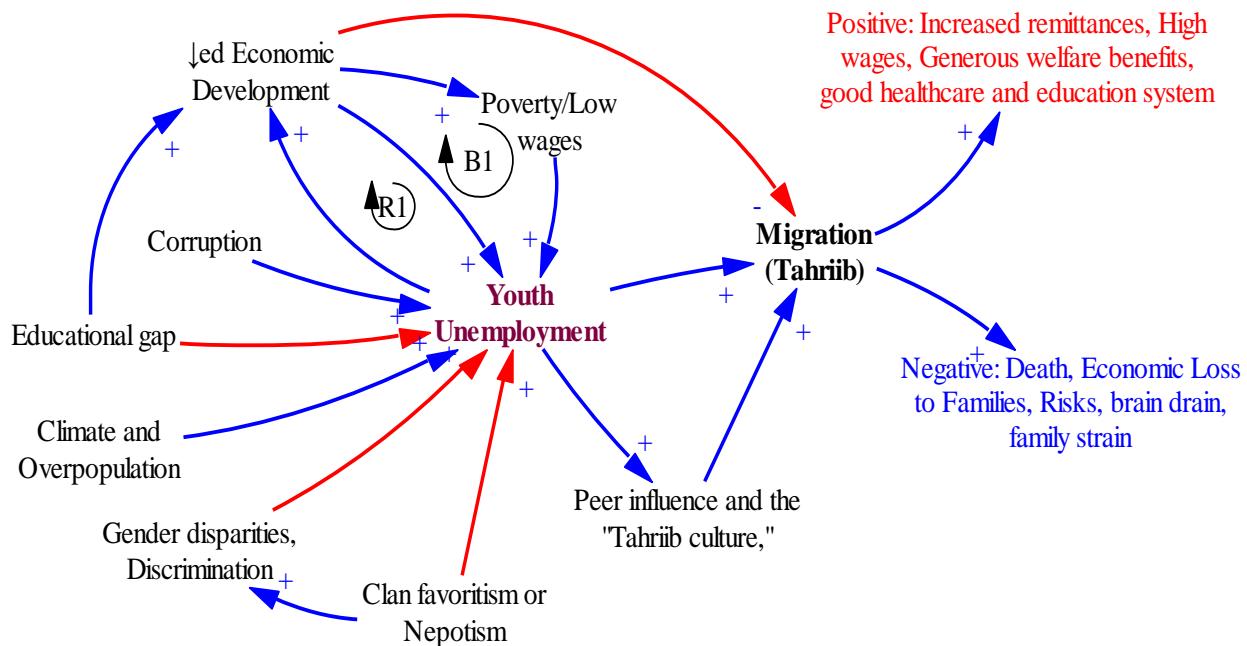


Figure 1: CLD capturing the interconnections between Unemployment and Migration in Somalia (Source: Own diagram)

A lack of education limits economic development, reducing job creation opportunities and aggravating unemployment. High youth unemployment drives many to migrate, seeking better opportunities abroad. This is influenced by societal norms (the "Tahriib culture"). Migration is depicted as having both negative outcomes (e.g., death, immediate family economic loss, risks, family strain, brain drain) and few after Tahriib positive outcomes (e.g., remittances, high wages, welfare benefits). The cause tree below, Figure 2, visually depicts the relationships between youth unemployment in Puntland and its root causes, as well as one significant outcome (referred to as "Tahriib").

“Despite the severe challenges, Somalia's young population represents a potential engine for future growth if adequate investments are made in education, infrastructure, and economic opportunities”

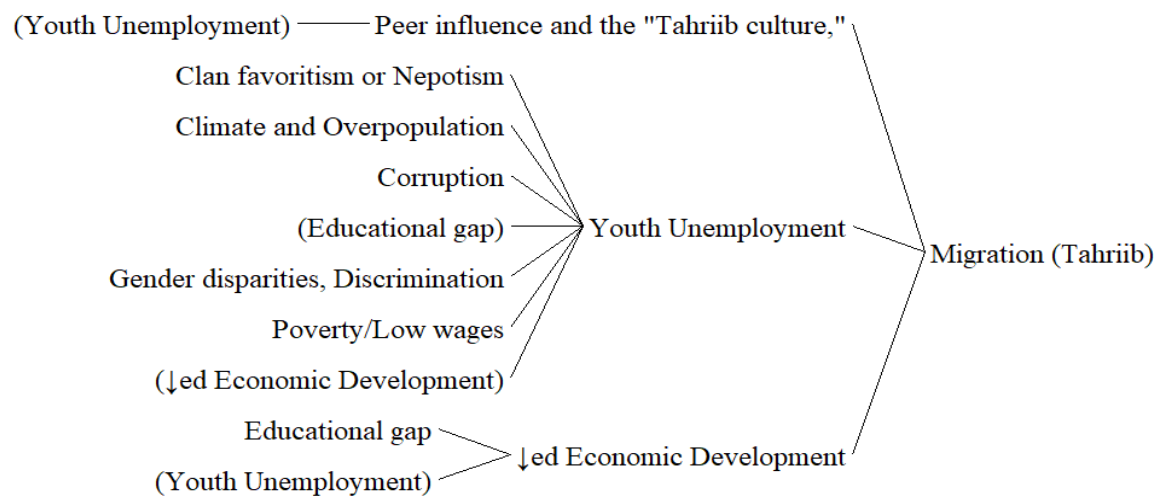


Figure 2: Causes tree on youth unemployment and migration (Source: Own diagram)

Youth unemployment creates a poverty cycle in which unemployment keeps a significant portion of the population in poverty, with limited income generation opportunities. In Puntland, "Tahriib" (irregular migration) has become normalized, especially among youth influenced by peers, societal narratives, and human smugglers. Unemployed youth see migration as an escape from economic stagnation and a means to improve their families' welfare through remittances.

4. Addressing Youth Unemployment

Addressing youth unemployment in Puntland requires a multifaceted approach focusing on skills training, economic development, policy reforms, and community engagement. The Puntland government, civil society organizations, and international partners can use the policies and strategies below to address Puntland's youth unemployment problems.

a) Promote Entrepreneurship and Small Businesses

Strategy: Provide financial support, mentorship, and training to young entrepreneurs to help them start businesses. For instance, (1) microfinance initiatives in Puntland can provide small loans to youth, enabling them to establish and grow businesses, and (2) startup incubators train young people in entrepreneurship, linking them to markets and resources.

b) Expand Vocational Training and Skills Development

Strategy: Develop vocational training centers that teach skills aligned with local economic demands, such as agriculture, fisheries, construction, and technology. For instance, (1) expanding and supporting vocational training centers in Puntland that focus on equipping youth with practical skills, like carpentry and mechanics, to enhance employability., and (2) matching the existing projects with youth priorities like introducing new technical and vocational education training (TVET) programs tailored to local job markets in Somalia.

c) Youth Employment promotion in Agricultural and Fisheries Sectors

There is substantial evidence that agricultural extensions and agrifood systems can provide new opportunities and jobs for unemployed, underemployed, and disadvantaged youth and boost their entrepreneurial capacity to take advantage of economic opportunities.

Strategy: Invest in modern farming techniques, irrigation systems, and fishing equipment to create employment opportunities in Puntland's primary industries. For instance, (1) build skills and enhance youth agricultural and fishery vocational training and start-up businesses, and (2) connect youth to investment agencies and financial institutions to have access to financial resources in start-ups, agricultural and fishery investment to expand youth employment.

d) Strengthen Education Systems

Strategy. Reform education to align with labor market needs and improve access to secondary and tertiary education, particularly for marginalized groups.

e) Address System Barriers

Strategy: Tackle corruption, nepotism, and clan favoritism in job recruitment processes.

Strengthen labor market policies and enforce equal opportunities. For instance, create a job board promoting merit-based hiring, transparency, and equity for women, marginalized, and disabled community members.

f) Promote Community Engagement and Awareness

Strategy: Organize campaigns to reduce the stigma around specific jobs and raise awareness about alternatives to irregular migration (Tahriib). For instance, civil society organizations like PYAN can run campaigns and skills competitions to engage youth and showcase local opportunities.

g) Leverage Digital Economy Opportunities

Strategy: Invest in ICT training and create platforms for youth to access remote work opportunities in freelancing, software development, and digital marketing. For instance, civil society organizations like PYAN can provide web development and graphic design training, preparing youth for online job markets.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

The causes of youth migration in Puntland are multi-faceted and complex, which include limited social services and job opportunities, loss of hope in the country, repetitive droughts, illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing, the influence of social media and peer groups, the influence of human smugglers, and the quality of the higher education are factors that determine Puntland youths to migrate from Puntland. This policy paper recommends an economic-driven response that includes creating massive employment opportunities for young people, establishing mechanisms for youth financing like improving microcredit financing, and placing unemployed graduates in the existing civil services by positioning them at ministries and government agencies.

Public employment programs, leadership, and internships are important labor market policy tools in situations of widespread unemployment. Examples of policy implications include (1) employment generation, such as investment in job creation programs and vocational training; For instance, expanding vocational training, particularly in sectors with high growth potential (e.g., ICT, fisheries, renewable energy), (2) education reform, which aligns skills development with labor market demands, (3) community awareness by highlighting migration risks and promoting local opportunities, and (4) more robust governance like addressing corruption and improving access to youth-focused services.

“The conditions of young people in Somalia, especially those who are unemployed or underemployed, must be a major concern for both policy and decision-makers.”